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ABSTRACT

The University of Tennessee (Knoxville) offers as a special section of the public speaking curriculum, a "speech anxiety" program, taught by faculty and graduate students from the speech and theatre and educational psychology departments and staff from the counseling services center. The students spend the first few weeks of the special section developing more positive attitudes about communicating. In about the third or fourth weeks of the quarter, they deliver a 2 to 3 minute speech defining a term or phrase to a lab group of about 8 or 10 students with whom they have previously engaged in several interpersonal or small group exercises. These speeches are videotaped and later shown to the students to give them a base for measuring improvement in specific speech skills. A portion of the course grade is based on improvement in specific skills. The course also deals with other aspects of speech preparation including the development of effective supporting material, organization of the speech, and audience analysis. A videotaped speech by the instructor provides a model for the students. At the end of the quarter, students comment on the elements of the class that have or have not been helpful. The most commonly mentioned helpful aspect of the course is the "graduated approach" to giving a speech. Anonymous student evaluations completed at the end of the class indicate a greater positive change toward the special section than toward other sections of the class. (HTH)

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THE SPEECH ANXIETY PROGRAM AT UTK: A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH HIGH PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

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An ever increasing body of literature in our field is pointing to a group of students who experience difficulty with the act of communicating.[1] We have begun to not only be concerned about understanding a broad range of phenomena frequently referred to as communication apprehension, reticence, shyness, unwillingness to communicate, and speech anxiety, but we have also raised the issues of what can be done about them and whether, when, and how we should undertake to facilitate change in the patterns of communication avoidance and negative attitudes which some of our students hold toward communication.[2] This latter force allows us to focus the power of our research tools on human actualization rather than viewing "communication apprehension", "reticence", or "shyness" as some kind of illness which must be treated by an "expert". It tends to place the responsibility for one's attitudes and behaviors back on oneself, and as such make the topics of avoidance of communication and negative attitudes about communication more amenable to classroom consideration, especially the humanistic classroom.

Results of a recent survey reported by Foss[3] shows the existence of a substantial number of special programs for helping communication anxious or reticent college students. Some of these programs are extracurricular in the sense that they may support a communication class, but are not a part of the required activities for the class, while other programs integrate the special training into either an elective course or a special section of a required communication course. While the survey does not clearly specify, it implies very strongly that the focus of most of these programs is on communication apprehension or communication avoidance at the <u>interpersonal</u> level rather than the <u>public speaking</u> level.

This focus of concern on the interpersonal level probably reflects the fact that many departments tend to have a basic course that is more general in nature, considering communication phenomena all the way from intrapersonal to public communication. Yet there are still schools at which the communication course that is required for most students is a basic course in public speaking. This is certainly true of our school, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. What is also true is that the type of special program for communication avoidant or negatively inclined students is different than the program which one will find where the basic course is more oriented toward communication principles in a more general way. For that reason, I want to describe the context and development of the Speech Anxiety Program which has developped at the University of Tennessee. I intend to include in the paper a discussion of the practices we have found particularly helpful and a general discussion of the perceived effectiveness of the program.

"Speech Anxiety Program" is the label which we have used at our school to designate the efforts made by a handful of faculty members and graduate students from the Department of Speech and Theatre, the Department of Educational Psychology, and the UT Counseling Services Center to assist highly speech anxious students to feel more comfortable about giving a speech, and attain requisite skills for the presentation of a speech. The program is primarily in support of the speech communication course most commonly required by UT students, namely the public speaking class. At present, while the program is interdisciplinary in nature, the primary responsibility for the direction of the program is within the Department of Speech and Theatre, where a special section of the public speaking class for "speech anxious" students is offerred every quarter except during the summer. The size of the class varies, but usually ranges between 20 and 30 students, which is roughly 5% of the enrollment in the regular sections of the public speaking class.

The main activity of the Speech Anxiety Program has not always been the offering of a special section of our basic course. When we began the program nine years ago in the Summer of 1973, students enrolled in the public speaking class who scored high on the PRCA-C were given the opportunity to participate in a non-credit 6 hour workshop which was designed to help the student reduce anxiety about giving a speech. The workshops were taught by Counseling Center staff or Speech Department faculty or graduate students and provided training in systematic desensitization as applied to the public speaking situation. Such workshops were our primary medium for helping highly speech anxious students until the Spring of 1977, at which time we offerred the first special section of public speaking for speech anxious students. We reasoned at that time that it would be more cost-efficient to integrate the training into the curriculum and we felt that the training might be more effective if the instructor was more directly associated with the special kinds of training that were used. Pre-post measures using the PRCA-C had indicated that the workshop training had been effective in reducing the participants' anxiety[4], but several difficulties bothered us. One was the time that was required to schedule the special workshop times and notify the participants. This may seem minor, but when you're trying to accomodate the class schedules of 15 to 30 students so as to find free time to assign them to 4 or 5 groups which will meet twice a week, one begins to understand the problem a little better. A second difficulty was that while the systematic desensitization training employed in the workshop was effective in reducing the anxiety of those persons completing the workshop, our dropout rate from the first to the second meeting was fairly high. We theorized that at least part of this effect was a motivational problem. Given the press of other class activities and extra-curricular concerns, many students will choose not to take on additional noncredit training unless it is very clear that the training is providing some immediate and directly needed improvement. My own experience with teaching systematic desensitization tells me that while an initial session of relaxation can be very

rewarding, it can also be more than a little difficult for the student to see how lying on a carpeted floor with a pillow behind your head and doing relaxation exercises can be effective in getting one to feel more comfortable while giving a speech. It takes an act of faith that the student who lacks confidence in his ability to effectively negotiate the public speaking situation is sometimes not willing to make regardless of how credible a facilitator one is. In short, we felt that some other kind of motivation which could be mediated by the classroom environment would help to keep the student in the systematic desensitization training at least long enough for them to begin to experience the potentially positive effects.

Whatever our reasons for doing so, we instituted the special section of the public speaking class for "speech anxious" students in the Spring of 1977, and have taught a section of that class every quarter since then, except for summers, during which time our overall enrollment for public speaking has not been large enough to justify such a special section.

A critical question for any program providing communication training for anxious students is how you go about identifying and selecting students for the program. Our primary means for identifying students involves a high degree of self selection. The timetable of classes, which the students use for preregistration and registration each quarter, identifies the special section of the public speaking class by a message following the section number which indicates that this particular section of the class is for "speech anxious" students only, and further indicates that enrollment requires the permission of the instructor, whose name, office and phone number are listed. At this point, let me note that the author of this paper has been the instructor of the special section throughout the time that it has been taught. In that sense, our program is very much like the majority of programs, being directed by only one person, even though a number of people from our Counseling Center and from our graduate and undergraduate students have provided support to it in the past. During preregistration, the computer treats the class as if the limits for enrollment is one person, such that all students, but one, who attempt to enroll get a message back that the class is closed. If the students do as they are recommended to do and contact the instructor of the class, I take their names and relevant information and tell them not to worry about the message that comes back indicating that the section is closed, but to show up the first day of class, being sure to bring an add slip which I will sign and allow them into the class. This is true only for those students for whom I feel the class is appropriate. In selecting among those students who request entry into the class, I have two basic concerns: (1) That the student understand what the class is about, and (2) That the student indicate verbally that he or she experiences an above average amount of anxiety about giving a speech. At this point in time, I do not ask the students to fill out a paper and pencil test, and I do not go through an elaborate interview with them. Part of my reasoning for this is that I feel that the student knows more about his own experience than I do, and I want

us to come to a joint decision about whether the class seems to be at least roughly the kind of experience that would be a valuable experience for the student. The second reason for the nature of the procedure during preregistration is that the number requesting the class at that point does not push the limits of the class.

There is a second step to getting students into the special section of the class, and it occurs during the first week of class. While maybe between 60 to 75% of the enrollment for the special section class is selected during preregistration period (which is usually the fifth or sixth week of the quarter preceding the one in which the students will take the class), we also recognize that some of the people who are required to take the class, but are especially nervous about giving speeches will not notice the announcement of the special section in the timetable during preregistation. Consequently, during the first day of class, the instructors of the regular sections of the public speaking class administer the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), and the students self score the instrument. Students are told that if they have higher scores (one standard deviation or more about the mean) on the instrument that they may want to consider taking the special section of the public speaking class for speech anxious students, and that they must get the permission of the instructor of that section if they wish to enroll. We try to emphasize that the scores are only a general indicator of whether the student would find the section helpful and encourage the student to talk with me if she has doubts as to whether or not the special section might be appropriate for her. Approximately 25 to 40% of the students come to the class by this second route. It is at this point that I am required to exercise a little more selectivity in that I am willing to allow as many as 20 to 25 students total into the class, but the demand will often exceed that number. Consequently, it is at this point at the beginning of the quarter that I must become more selective. The primary question I ask myself is: How much does the student need to get the public speaking course this quarter? This, of course, gives priority to upperclassmen. Students who I cannot get into the course during a particular quarter are advised to preregister for the course in a subsequent quarter, or if I determine that they want to go ahead and attempt the regular section of the class in which they are enrolled, we offer to provide the noncredit training in relaxation if they are interested. I should note that there usually are some students who score high on the PRPSA who stay in the regular section of the class and complete it successfully apparently without any harmful side effects. This is not to say that the special section of the class is not needed. Instead, I think it is a tribute to good teaching and the value of applying good common sense and directed effort in relating to students' needs.

While the essential goals of teaching students to better understand and apply the principles of public speaking are common for both classes, the special section of the class differs from the regular public speaking sections in several ways. The main differences are determined by the greater emphasis the special section places on helping the student to more effectively cope with

his nervousness about speaking. Consequently, the first few weeks of the course are spent trying to develop a more positive attitude about communicating. This has been partially accomplished by systematic desensitization (or a related form of relaxation called cue controlled relaxation), a rough form of cognitive restructuring, a graduated series of progressively more complicated and more anxiety provoking communication exercises (partially achieved by gradually increasing the size of the audience), and training in specific skills that are necessary to present an effective presentation (especially delivery skills such as how to prepare an effective set of usable notes). The strategy early in the course, thus, is to help the student feel more positive about approaching the communication situation by teaching skills for coping with feelings as well as skills which will ultimately allow the student to more effectively present a speech. At this point, my concern is as much with the student's attitude as it is with the actual performance since it seems to me that attitude and performance are interactive. A more positive attitude is more likely to lead to the student attempting performance. With appropriate skills instruction and rehearsal, performance can lead to a more positive attitude toward communication. Ultimately, the concern of our program is with performance, but one aspect of performance is whether a person continues to approach or chooses to avoid future speaking opportunities after she finishes the course, and since attitude plays such an important part in the student's approach-avoidance tendencies, I don't think there is any way we can avoid dealing with students' attitudes about communicating.

In roughly the third or fourth week of the course, all students in the class are asked to deliver a two to three minute speech in which they define a term or phrase; the speech is delivered to a lab group of about 8 to 10 students with whom they have previously engaged in several interpersonal or small group exercises. These definition speeches are videotaped and in the subsequent lab period are shown back to the student along with the other members of the lab group to whom the student delivered the speech. My purpose in taping the speeches is to give the student the opportunity to have a base for measuring improvement in specific speech skills; I attempt to motivate students by assigning a portion of their course grade (approximately a fifth) to how much improvement they make on specific delivery skills. The goal analysis procedure which has been used in the Penn State reticence program[6] is adapted to specific speech delivery skills such as looking at the audience more, using gestures to emphasize main points, and pausing between sentences without using articulated pauses. Consequently, the group viewing of the student's previously videotaped definition speech serves the function of allowing the student to begin to see specific delivery skills on which the student might improve. It also serves the use of getting students used to seeing themselves on videotape, which can be intimidating, to say the least. During the group viewing, we stop between speeches to ask the student's response to seeing herself. We encourage other students in the group to point out aspects they liked about the speech. In general,

we encourage the groups viewing the speeches to be realistic, but positive, and the instructor attempts to do the same. Very rarely will we discuss specific goals on which the student wants to improve within the group videotape viewing, and then usually only at the participant's request. This function is performed later in a conference with the instructor. After seeing one's definition speech in the lab group setting, the student sets a conference time with the instructor, at which time he is expected to state two or three goals on which he would like to improve, and together with the instructor, the student once again views the videotape of the definition speech, and both of us negotiate what specific delivery goals the student will attempt to achieve. During the conference, the instructor points out possible areas for improvement the student may not have observed, confirms or helps to modify the statement of goals the student has initially selected, suggests specific ways of determining whether the goals have been met, and suggests special strategies for working on the goals. After the conference, the student completes and turns in a goal analysis form much like the one used in the Penn State program[7] in which she states the goals in behavioral terms, indicates what specific performances will have to take place to say that the goals have been achieved, and outlines the strategies for attempting to accomplish the goals. Finally, the student is asked to evaluate her goal achievement following each of the three graded speeches in the class (these speeches begin two or three weeks after the videotaping of the definition speeches) by observing videotapes of the graded speeches and writing an analysis in which the student compares her actual performance to the standard which she has set in the goal analysis procedure completed earlier.

While the goal analysis procedure described here would make it appear that our primary concern in teaching/learning is with speech delivery, this is certainly not the case. The course also deals with other aspects of speech preparation including the development of effective supporting material, organization of the speech, and audience analysis. As previously noted, the goal analysis procedure counts only 20% of the student's overall course grade, and the instructor attempts to make delivery considerations a minor part of the evaluation of the three graded speeches for the course. Still the inclusion of the goal analysis procedure focussing on delivery elements makes the course different from our regular sections of the public speaking class in that the special section tends to place slightly more emphasis on delivery. Our reason for including this is an assumption that the speech anxious student is more concerned about how he appears and is also less confident about how he delivers a speech (more so than for speech preparation skills). In addition, we have observed that many of the people who come through the class have an unrealistic view of how they come across to an audience. We view the use of the videotaping and the correspondent goal analysis procedure as a means of helping the student to develop a more realistic, positive, and coping view toward her communication in the public speaking setting.

One of the other techniques we use in the speech anxiety class is a generalized use of modelling. Before each of the graded speeches, we attempt to show the student a few examples of speeches of the type the student is required to deliver, the examples being speeches which were delivered by former students in the class and which appear to the instructor to be relatively successful achievements of that particular assignment. In addition, students are encouraged to listen to their classmates with the idea in mind of finding qualities which they like about how their classmates speak so they may emulate those qualities. The instructor of the class also attempts to provide a model. As an example of this, early in the quarter just prior to the definition speech which is videotaped, the instructor gives a short lecture on the effective use of notecards. In this case, I choose to "give a speech" in which I define some term the students need to understand, i.e., extemporaneous speaking. I use a note card to assist me, and we videotape my presentation. Afterwards, we play back the videotape of the speech, and the students are given a mimeographed copy of the note card I used to deliver the speech. We, then, talk through why I prepared my notes as I did with an effort being made to encourage the practice of the concept I have just defined, extemporaneous speaking. To illustrate my use of modelling, I chose in this particular case the topic of how to effectively use note cards at least partially because I feel that this is a critical skill for speech anxious students. My own experience tells me that many of the students who are nervous about giving a speech are overly concerned about saying what they have to say "the right way". This leads to an attempt to memorize or manuscript the message. Consequently, Ifeel that it is necessary to spend more time on encouraging "extemporaneous" speaking for the speech anxious student than the average student in the public speaking class. It is important that the student be convinced that the oral medium is different from the written medium.

With this idea of what our special section of public speaking for speech anxiety is about, let me now turn to some evaluational data of the program. I'll begin by noting which aspects of the class students report that they have found most and least useful.

At the end of almost every quarter, we ask students to rank, rate, or comment on the elements of the special section class which have been especially helpful or not helpful to them. Our purpose in doing so is to give us another perspective for improvement of the class, and the results have been quite instructive. By far, the most commonly mentioned helpful aspect of the course is the "graduated approach" to giving a speech. As I explained earlier, this consists of starting students speaking in small informal groups requiring uncomplicated goals and gradually moving the student to speaking to larger groups and making the assignments incrementally more didficult. Thus, the student in the special section class winds up giving more speeches, though none of the first few he gives is particularly difficult. This is actually an application of the underlying principle of systematic desensitization to the real situation (or in vivo desensitization), and it is my firm belief that it is not only the element of the class

that students report as being singularly most helpful, but that it is also the element that is most responsible for allowing the students to reduce their anxiety about giving a speech to the point that they can begin to focus on what things they might do to improve their communication effectiveness.

Other aspects of the course that are reported as being very helpful to the student include receiving the videotape feedback on their speeches, seeing sample speeches given in previous quarters, the emphasis in the class given to using notecards appropriately, and the use of the goal analysis procedure to identify areas for improvement and chart the improvement. The use of cognitive restructuring is listed as quite helpful to some students, but is listed by the overall group as lower in helpfulness than the previously listed items. Interestingly, the systematic desensitization and the cue controlled relaxation, which were the basis of the training in the workshop stage of development of our overall program, are ranked similarly with the cognitive restructuring. The relaxation training appears to be helpful to some people, but others found it of little use. This has led us to consider this part of the course as optional. Instead of requiring all the students in the class to participate in the cue controlled relaxation sessions, we now tell them about the procedure at the beginning of the class, indicate what type of student we think would most likely benefit from it, and offer the relaxation training outside the class on a voluntary basis in a noncredit workshop as we did before we started the special section of the class. Usually, not more than one-fourth of the students in the class will opt to be in the cue controlled relaxation group. This probably is a more efficient way of using the cue control training because of the student's increased involvement created by her choice in the matter. We attempt to place any student in the regular sections of the class who is highly speech anxious, but cannot take the special section during a given quarter into the out of class cue control relaxation group we set up for the students in the speech anxious class. There are other aspects of the special section class which students report as being particularly helpful, but the ones mentioned above are the main ones.

Besides student evaluations, we administer a verbal report of public speaking anxiety (PRPSA) both at the beginning and at the end of the class. While the PRCA is used to identify students who are highly anxious more frequently, I feel that the PRPSA has greater face validity in the context in which we are operating. The PRPSA is a 34 item questionnaire which requires the student to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 different aspects of how he feels about giving a speech, such that overall scores on the test can range from 34 to 170 with the larger scores representing greater intensity of public speaking anxiety.[8] A theoretically "average" score on the instrument would be 102 (a neutral or '3' response on all 34 items), but the mean obtained when we have surveyed all sections of the public speaking class has ranged from 104 to 109 at the beginning of the class. In contrast, the mean on the PRPSA for students beginning the special section class has ranged between 130 and 143 for the different classes we have taught to date.

That number is at least one full standard deviation above the average for all sections combined. It should be noted that students in the special section class (with the exception of those who come into the class through the regular sections where they are administered the PRPSA during the first day of class) do not complete the PRPSA until they have been admitted to the class (my permission as instructor being required to enter), so they have no reason to inflate their scores in order to be admitted. The post course mean for the special section class ranges between 102 and 117 on the PRPSA and the average decline in anxiety is 30 points or about one and a half standard deviations. Thus, the students' report of how they feel about giving a speech indicates that the special section class is effective in accomplishing its goal of reducing anxiety about speaking.

One might question whether training in public speaking in the other sections of the class does not accomplish the same thing which the special section class does. We have data on decreases on the PRPSA for all sections of the public speaking class during the Spring quarter of 1976, and the decline was only 13 points, from 109 to 96. While the special section of public speaking had not yet been started in 1976, 9 of the students taking the class that quarter had volunteered to go through the systematic desensitization noncredit workshop, and their drops on the PRPSA from the beginning of the course to the end were 20 points greater than matched students who had comparably high PRPSA scores at the beginning of the course, but had not gone through the systematic desensitization training.

A second piece of information also suggests the effectiveness of the special section for speech anxious students in accomplishing its stated goal of helping the anxious student better cope with the public speaking situation. In December of 1978, students completing the public speaking class (Fall, 1978) were surveyed as to the degree to which they thought they had accomplished a number of different goals which a course in public speaking might set, i.e., organizing a speech, finding supporting material, relating to an audience, etc. One of the goals mentioned on the survey was "Feeling more comfortable or relaxed about giving a speech". On a 3 point scale (3=Learned nothing and 1=Learned a lot), students in the special section class averaged 1.29 on the degree to which they had learned to relax or feel comfortable about giving a speech. Students in the other sections averaged 1.50 on the same item, thus indicating that the students in the special section of the class at least thought they had learned more about relaxing while giving a speech than the students in the other sections of the class.

Finally, anonymous student evaluations done at the end of the special section class indicate a greater positive change toward the class than other sections of the class. During the 1978-1979 school year, the instructor of the special section class administered a post course anonymous questionnaire for each of the classes (Fall, Winter, and Spring). The questionnaire was a modification of the one developped by the Learning Resource Center

at UTK (SRI-2) for course evaluation. The questionnaire was scored by the instructor after the grades had been turned in. It has two questions on it which deal with the student's attitude toward the class, both before and after the class. The results on this question indicated that students substantially improved their attitudes toward the class. The average on the before class item was 3.30 (N=44) and the average on the after class attitude was 1.84 (N=44) (Scores could range from 1-exceptional to 5-poor). The instructor of the class then examined previous evaluations of public speaking classes he had taught, and in which he had administered the SRI-2. These would have been regular sections of the public speaking class. In those classes, the students averaged a 3.04 on the pre-class attitude and 2.56 for the post-class attitude. Thus, the special section seems to be starting with students who are less positive toward the public speaking class (which makes sense) and apparently leads to more positive attitudes.

The special section of the public speaking class for speech anxious students is, thus, the main activity within the overall Speech Anxiety Program at UTK. The program, because of its focus on servicing students who are highly anxious about giving speeches and are also required to take a basic public speaking course, is in many ways different from other programs which are designed to assist students who are avoidant of communication or have negative attitudes toward communication. Our focus on public speaking limits us in some ways, and there are plans to extend our training to the interpersonal level. Still, we feel that the program has been moderately successful in accomplishing what it set out to do and that it can serve as a sound base for relating to other communication difficulties.

NOTES

[1]William Work, "On Communication Apprehension: Everything You've Wanted to Know But Have Been Afraid to Ask," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 248-257.

[2]See for example Gerald M. Phillips (ed.), "The Practical Teachers' Symposium on Shyness, Communication Apprehension, Reticence, and a Variety of Other Common Problems," Communication Education, 29 (1980) 213-263, and Gerald M. Phillips (ed.), "Coming of Age in the Academy: A Symposium," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 177-223.

[3]Karen A. Foss, "Communication Apprehension: Resources for the Instructor," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 195-203.

[4]The results of the workshop stage of the Speech Anxiety Program are discussed by Richard Nash and John Edgerly, "Accountability Efforts Which Have Worked (?) and Not Worked (?)," Paper presented at the Annual Conference of University and College Counseling Center Directors, Snowbird, Utah, 1976.

[5]Jan Hoffman and Jo Sprague, "A Survey of Reticence and Communication Apprehension Treatment Programs at U.S. Colleges and Universities," Communication Education, 31 (1982) 187.

[6]Herman Cohen, "Teaching Reticent Students in a Required Course," Communication Education, 29 (1980) 222-228.

[7]Cohen, 1980, 227.

[8]James C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs, 37 (1970) 269-277.